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ABSTRACT

Many of the problems encountered by learning disabled high school students in the transition from secondary to postsecondary education settings can be minimized if planning for transition occurs at high school entry. Transition planning for the college bound learning disabled student needs to include the design of a relevant high school curriculum based on the requisite entry level skills that have been identified as important for success in college settings. At the same time, curriculum referenced assessment procedures that focus on these skills need to be developed and implemented in order to link assessment results with instructional planning. Student progress with the curriculum or individualized education program (IEP) designed from the assessments must also be monitored and further adapted to the student's individual needs, if necessary. The curriculum or IEP must also be evaluated to determine followup needs for the student's successful transition to college. (Author/CB)

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CURRICULUM-BASED ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES FOR SECONDARY LEARNING DISABLED STUDENTS: STUDENT-CENTERED AND PROGRAMMATIC IMPLICATIONS

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Long Island University Transition Project
Learning How to Learn: A High School/College Linkage Model
To Expand Higher Educational Opportunities for Learning Disabled Students

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Abstract

Many of the problems encountered by learning disabled high school students in the transition from secondary to post-secondary education settings can be minimized if planning for transition occurs at high school entry. Transition planning for the college-bound learning disabled student needs to include the design of a relevant high school curriculum based on the requisite entry-level skills that have been identified as important for success in college settings. At the same time, curriculum-referenced assessment procedures that focus on these skills need to be developed and implemented in order to link assessment results with instructional planning. The student-centered and programmatic implications of a curriculum-based approach to instructional decision-making for the college-bound LD high school student are described.

Currently, curriculum-based assessment is being treated in the literature as an important component in the instructional decision-making process. There is a growing interest in developing reliable methods of linking assessment results to curriculum and instruction. A number of writers encourage regular and special educators to use curriculum-referenced assessments that focus on relevant classroom skills in order to make informed, curricular decisions applicable to instruction (Blankenship, 1985; Deno, 1985; Wang and Lindvall, 1984).

At the same time, there is a growing body of information about the learning disabled (LD) college-bound high school student that provides a framework for curricular planning that will enhance their opportunities for success in college settings. The findings from research on LD secondary and post-secondary students identify specific areas of academic need (e.g., skill deficits in reading-related study strategies such as comprehension monitoring, notetaking, summarizing, outlining, etc.) relative to the complex demands placed on LD students by secondary and post-secondary classroom environments. (Warner, Alley, Deshler and Schumaker, 1980; Blalock, 1980; Moran, 1980). It has also been proposed that the curriculum developed for LD high school students needs to be based on those skills and behaviors that have been identified in post-secondary settings as important for the successful transition of the college-bound LD student. Therefore, the high school curriculum should provide the LD student with those prerequisite entry-level skills that can help them to better meet the demands of college programs (Seidenberg, 1986).

In order to make the necessary, relevant linkage for LD high school students between a curriculum, primarily based on college entry-level skills, and their instructional program, curriculum-referenced assessment procedures need to be developed and implemented. A curriculum-based

assessment approach has implications for three aspects of the teaching-learning process: program planning, monitoring of student progress, and program evaluation.

Assessment Defined

Salvia and Ysseldyke (1984) define assessment as the process of understanding the performance of students in terms of their current ecology or learning environment. Similarly, the manner in which assessment will be described in this paper should not be equated with formal testing or evaluation.

Formal testing generally implies only the assessment of the student and not the conditions under which the student will be expected to perform. Formal tests are usually designed to sample a wide range of behaviors in order to demonstrate differences among groups of students (Gagne, 1965). They are generally not able to provide useful information about LD secondary students' competence in those specific skills that need to be acquired in order to adjust and perform well in a college setting. The scores that are derived from formal tests, which sample general knowledge or skills, are not particularly useful in making decisions about specific knowledge or skills that need to be taught. In contrast, informal tests that are curriculum-referenced permit the collection of data on those specific skills that have been identified as directly related to needed competencies. The information generated by informal assessment can lead to the specification of relevant instructional goals and objectives for the college-bound LD secondary student.

Therefore, assessment of the LD high school student, as used in the context of this paper, involves analyzing the competencies of the student in terms of the demands of the college environment and requires the development and interpretation of the match between the two. Assessment

and program planning for the college-bound LD high school student needs to be based upon informal achievement testing of the present functional levels of those observable skills that are equated with college entry-level performance skills. In the curriculum-based assessment approach, it is anticipated that the high school personnel (e.g., psychologists, counselors, teachers) who have primary responsibility for the development and implementation of the LD student's IEP will also carry out many of the curriculum-based assessment activities.

Program Planning

Curriculum-referenced assessment of student competencies provides the framework for program planning. By analyzing the demands of the college environment and identifying requisite entry-level skills a relevant curriculum can be designed. Following this, the student's present level of performance along the continuum of competencies in the curriculum can be identified. The results of this assessment can be indicated in the present levels of performance section of the IEP and can also guide the development of the annual goals and short-term objectives. In this way, the assessment results can be used for placement of the student in the curriculum, for the design of instructional interventions, and to characterize any supportive services needed by the student for survival in the regular classroom.

The nature of the assessment procedures appropriate here can range from informal teacher observations to teacher-made performance samples that are curriculum-referenced. The instrumentation necessary can be informal, teacher-made, and referenced directly to the curriculum.

Monitoring of Student Progress

This is a familiar phase of the assessment process and involves monitoring students' achievement as they progress through the curriculum sequence. Measures can include: (a) teacher made tests; (b) observations

of student performance; (c) anecdotal information from the student and his or her regular classroom teachers; (d) evaluation of products generated in special and/or regular classes; and (e) evaluation of regular class grades.

In general, initial program planning decisions based on preliminary assessment information are hypotheses and only careful, ongoing assessment of a student's acquisition of specific knowledge and skills as well as actual classroom performance can validate the initial hypotheses. Teachers can plan, develop and use systematic approaches in order to obtain meaningful data on the effectiveness of the instructional program (Mirkin, Fuchs, and Deno, 1982). However, here again, the emphasis is on curriculum-referenced assessment measures and informal teacher evaluations of performance in order to assess student progress in attainment of short-term objectives and annual goals.

Evaluation of the Program

The IEP annual review process can be used to evaluate the efficacy of the total program in meeting the objectives outlined earlier for the student. In addition to the assessment of student progress, this stage of the evaluation process can also provide information about the value of the overall program. Basic issues that can be considered here include: (a) the suitability of the curriculum and interventions to the needs and abilities of the student; (b) the effectiveness of the support services in supporting the student's performance in regular classes; (c) the need to modify or extend the current curriculum areas and/or interventions; and (d) the kinds of follow-up needs that have been identified for the student required for a successful transition to a college setting.

Conclusion

The curriculum-based assessment approach described above is probably not a new concept for many special educators. However, the framework

in which it has been placed, that is, the specific focus on the pre-requisite skills needed by the LD high school student, is important for the successful transition to a college setting. Many of the inadequacies and limitations of current assessment procedures can be eliminated when the data about student's achievement is made more integral to instruction and to on-going teacher decision-making by the use of a curriculum-referenced approach.

In addition to the implications of a curriculum-based assessment approach for program planning and evaluation, this approach will also provide better data for more effective communication with parents and students with regard to opportunities for post-secondary education. Finally, this assessment approach will also impact on the roles and responsibilities of high school personnel involved in the transition of the learning disabled college-bound student. Implementation of curriculum-based procedures requires a reformulation of the roles and responsibilities of psychologists, counselors and teachers, in that, the focus of their activities needs to include and be more directly related to the 'ecology' of the college environment and the requisite skills needed by the LD student, rather than a focus on the more traditional activities such as testing of intellectual ability, remediation of academic skills and identification of appropriate college programs.

If we perceive the assessment process as a method of matching curriculum, student competencies, and the demands of the learning environment, the linkage between assessment results and the effective transition of the college-bound LD high school student can be more readily realized. Many of the post-secondary transition problems encountered by LD students can be minimized or eliminated when the high school curriculum is matched to the demands of the college environment and when criterion-referenced assessment

procedures are developed and implemented by high school personnel who are more directly involved in transitional planning for the college-bound LD student.

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